



**NORTHCENTRAL UNIVERSITY
ASSIGNMENT COVER SHEET**

Student: **Michael Higley-Vance**

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Academic integrity: All work submitted in each course must be your own original work. This includes all assignments, exams, term papers, and other projects required by your instructor. Knowingly submitting another person's work as your own, without properly citing the source of the work, is considered plagiarism. This will result in an unsatisfactory grade for the work submitted or for the entire course. It may also result in academic dismissal from the University.

EL7008-8

Dr. Linda Collins

Online Learning Communities

Activity #6: Meaningful Feedback

Comments:

Faculty Use Only

Hi, Michael, I do not think you have over-used Palloff and Pratt and agree with you that this resource provides an important foundation. The immediacy theory for feedback is important in the online environment to help to avoid a feeling of isolation and to foster an online learning community. It was important for you to note that there can be misinterpretations in communicating only with text in the online environment and that videos could be helpful. How might we add this type of feedback as instructors for the classes you are taking at NCU? You go on to discuss that meaningful feedback needs to

also be constructive feedback and instructors need to demonstrate their interest in their students and the topic. This is the way to connect to students and also show the importance of the activities and help encourage engaging learner-learner discussions. You have also discussed the importance of self-reflection. Until self-reflection activities are embedded into activities, some students have discussed that it seemed like something “extra” to do but they did not have time to do this. After participating in self-reflection activities, many of my students did find it provided more of a deeper learning experience. Excellent work on this activity!

Dr. Linda D. Collins 6.9 3 May 19, 2014

Meaningful Feedback

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Meaningful Feedback

Meaningful feedback is an essential component of the assessment process and critical to all learning environments. In online learning, feedback occurs between the learner and instructor in various ways (Bergstrom, 2011). Methods of communication in e-learning include verbal and written electronic exchanges called commuter-mediated communication (Kahai & Cooper, 2003), such as through Skype or e-mail. Instructor feedback provides learners with critical information about meeting course goals and performance expectations (Beebe, Vonderwell, & Boboc, 2010; Bergstrom, 2011; Paloff & Pratt, 2007). The purpose of this paper is to (a) define meaningful feedback, (b) discuss the importance of feedback, (c) evaluate the benefits that feedback offers and (c) summarize strategies that can be used to promote meaningful instructor feedback within online course discussions.

Immediacy Theory

Immediacy theory is grounded in Mehrabian's Implicit Communication Theory and postulates that both verbal and nonverbal behaviors are used during the communication process (Butland & Beebe,

1992). Mehrabian (1967) defined immediacy as the extent to which communicative behaviors enhance interpersonal communication through interactivity and participation. In other words, immediacy can be understood as communication behaviors that reduce perceived online presence, a necessary component of effective online learning environments (Woods & Baker, 2004). According to Mehrabian and Weiner (1964) verbal behaviors include the spoken word accompanied by tone of voice, whereas nonverbal behaviors deliver information about feelings and attitudes. In addition to accompanying the spoken word, tone is closely related to persons' feelings and attitudes, and has a greater overall effect than the content being communicated (Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967). Research supports that judgments about tone have a greater contribution to the interpretation of a message than does the content (Butland & Beebe, 1992; Kahai & Cooper, 2003; Mehrabian & Wiener, 1967; Velez, 2008).

Feedback immediacy is an important component of effective online communication according to Kahai and Cooper (2003). Communicating in the online learning environment requires computer-mediated communication systems such as computer conferencing systems, audio recording software, email, and video recording devices to name a few (Kahai and Cooper, 2003). In an online learning environment, even with audio recordings, there is a potential for non-verbal cues to be missing or misconstrued (Velez, 2008). Video can potentially capture non-verbal cues (Velez, 2008), though face-to-face communication is still absent from the online learning experience. As computer-mediated communication systems continue to develop improving online immediacy so will effective online teaching practices and meaningful feedback (Kahai & Cooper, 2003).

Importance of Feedback

Feedback is essential, given motivation is increased when instructors are interested in learner success in the program or course (Hazari, 2004). Meaningful feedback is necessary in an online learning environment because it provides constructive academic feedback learners use

during course work reflection (Conrad & Donaldson, 2012). Constructive feedback can be provided to the learner from both the instructor and peers (Paloff & Pratt, 2007). Positive feedback from the instructor encourages and motivates students to be active participants (Johnson, 2010). Therefore, instructors who provide online learners with constructive feedback help learning participants process new ideas and information while improving self-efficacy (Johnson, 2010; Palloff & Pratt, 2007).

Meaningful feedback allows the online learner to assess their progress and determine areas needed for self-improvement (Conrad & Donaldson, 2012). Instructor feedback impacts learners in meeting course goals and has a great deal of impact on overall learner performance outcomes (Beebe, Vonderwell, & Boboc, 2010; Bergstrom, 2011; Johnson, 2010; Palloff & Pratt, 2007). Learner self-reflection is beneficial for determining academic goals, performance outcomes, and helps with an overall understanding of course objectives.

Instructor Feedback

Meaningful feedback in the online classroom requires a partnership and trust between learner and instructor (Palloff & Pratt, 2007). This partnership requires the instructor to provide learners with meaningful and constructive feedback. The ability to provide effective feedback where learners think about the work he or she has produced, must be taught and encouraged by the instructor (Palloff & Pratt, 2007). Instructors can provide effective feedback by maintaining an encouraging tone and delivering feedback in a reasonable amount of time (Butland & Beebe, 1992; Hattie & Timperley, 2007; Johnson, 2010). Being responsive to student inquiries and posting grades in a timely fashion is an example of timely and responsive feedback. Instructors who provide thoughtful feedback provide the learner with an explanation for the performance outcomes for their work and an opportunity to understand areas where academic improvement is

needed (Butland & Beebe, 1992; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Additionally, feedback is not limited to the learner; teachers also benefit from the feedback learners provide (Collier & Yoder, 2002; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Learner feedback allows instructors to assess course content, pedagogy, and feedback for professional reflection about instructor presence in the online environment (Atkinson & Siew Leng, 2013; Collier & Yoder, 2002). Therefore, feedback should serve as a learning opportunity for both the instructor and learner.

Meaningful feedback can be embedded within thoughtfully developed online activities, which include collaborative assignments (Johnson, 2010; Palloff & Pratt, 2005). Online discussion activities, which include feedback to learners from the instructor and feedback from learner-to-learner are two ways to foster social presence and promote the exchange of experiences and opinions within the online learning environment (Collier & Yoder, 2002; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Providing effective feedback requires the use of a rubric, according to Palloff and Pratt (2005). Rubrics that include assignment expectations provide instructors with a tool for assessing and evaluating learner performance (Atkinson & Siew Leng, 2013; Palloff & Pratt, 2005).

It is also important for instructors to incorporate learner feedback in order to enhance and improve course activities (Collier & Yoder, 2002). Monitoring and assessing students' performance during the learning process and providing immediate feedback has a direct impact on the success of students' learning (Atkinson & Siew Leng, 2013). However, if the need to prompt further feedback from students appears necessary, then follow-up questions can be used (Johnson, 2010; Palloff & Pratt, 2005). An instructor might also make a supportive comment (Johnson, 2010) to each member of the group. Generating a friendly climate at the start of the course is also beneficial so an atmosphere exists where learners feel comfortable contributing on

an on-going basis (Collier & Yoder, 2002; Palloff & Pratt, 2007). It is ongoing contributions between peers and instructor that takes learning to the next level. Conversely, learner feedback provides online program administrators information on instructor performance, course goals, and quality of summative assessments (Beebe, Vonderwell, & Boboc, 2010; Bergstrom, 2011; Palloff & Pratt, 2007).

Learner-Learner Feedback

Instructor feedback provides learners with critical information, which impacts learning assumptions (Bandura, 1977; Beebe, Vonderwell, & Boboc, 2010; Bergstrom, 2011). In collaborative learning communities some students will assume mentoring roles providing other learners with important peer feedback as well (Tinoca, Oliveira, & Pereira, n.d.). The use of peer feedback within an online course places the learner in the role of instructor as learners begin to review, analyze, and synthesize peer work (Palloff & Pratt, 2005).

The key to peer feedback is that it is constructive, academically sound, and encouraging (Conrad & Donaldson, 2012). Learners are likely not to be “reticent” about the participation of their peers within collaborative group assignments (Palloff & Pratt, 2005, p. 48). Therefore, it is important that instructors provide learners with clear feedback expectations, which includes that learners provide peers with quality, timely, and academically focused feedback (Conrad & Donaldson, 2012; Palloff & Pratt, 2007). Rubrics can be developed to help guide peer feedback by providing necessary assignment or course expectations (Palloff & Pratt, 2005). Providing specific assignment rubrics encourage learners to be honest and constructive in the feedback they deliver to one another (Getman, 2005; Palloff & Pratt, 2005). Requiring learners to provide significantly relevant learner-to-learner feedback increases their own self-reflective skills (Getman, 2005). The process of reflective feedback forces learners to compare their standard for

learning to the learning standards of other group members (Getman, 2005; Palloff & Pratt, 2007). Lastly, Getman (2005) and Tinoca, Oliveria, and Pereira (n.d.) suggest that learners who participate in learner-to-learner feedback activities are better prepared for real-world situations.

Reflective feedback. Meaningful instructor feedback about assessment outcomes requires learners to engage in self-reflection to assess and inform on their own understanding of content learned (Conrad & Donaldson, 2012; Getman, 2005; Palloff & Pratt, 2007). According to Palloff and Pratt (2007) meaningful self-reflection is helpful for determining the level of online learning interactions, community building, and overall understanding of learning objectives. Assessment reflections can inform learners and instructors on how well learning and teaching is happening within the online learning environment (Beebe, Vonderwell, & Boboc, 2010). Reflecting on assessment outcomes can provide learners with important information about academic strengths and weaknesses offering learners an opportunity for self-reflection and improvement (Palloff & Pratt, 2007). Self-reflection allows learners to connect with content at a much deeper level and provides the instructor with evidence of individual learning (Palloff & Pratt, 2007). However, Beebe, Vonderwell, and Boboc (2010) note that learners need frequent opportunities to self-reflect on assessment outcomes and instructor feedback in order to effectively self-monitor and adjust their own learning.

Conclusion

Feedback immediacy is an important component of effective online communication. An online instructor presence that includes feedback is easily established within an online learning community and environment. Feedback can be given and received through the following interactions: instructor-to-learner, learner-to-instructor, and learner-to-learner. Meaningful feedback is necessary because it provides learners with constructive academic feedback in which to use to reflect, inform, and adjust

learning. In order for meaningful feedback to be used effectively a trust between learner and instructor must be developed, supported, and communicated.

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